

## ML.104.The SAC Aerobatics Teram

'Hedge's Animals' was a crew not unlike the 'Leper Colony' in the film 'Twelve O'clock High,' all extremely capable but simply lacking leadership. In both cases, with great leaders, they succeeded in producing enviable mission results. To build esprit, the crew sported Powder Blue, Okinawan tailor-made, unauthorized, Sharkskin, USAF Flight Suits.



The Viet Nam debacle was in its "full-speed, damn-the -torpedoes" tilt in the late sixties when the 'Animals' came to life! The 55<sup>th</sup> routinely deployed aircraft and crews intact to Okinawa in support. Occasionally a crew was deployed via 'Young Tiger' tankers, whose mission was to refuel fighters in theater and incidentally to transport crews and equipment to the Far East. This found our 'Animals' traveling as 'Pax' rather than flying their own aircraft, winging their way West with at least one stop at Hickam, and with questions from other flight crews about their unusual garments. Our intrepid, imaginative, and self-confident aviators had developed a standard answer by the time they arrived in Hawaii. They explained, with bemused disbelief that the questioners had not heard of their mission, "Why, by golly, we are part of the 'USAF, Multi-Engine-Aerobatic Team.'" When asked how they could perform such maneuvers our devils simply answered, "our aircraft have been especially modified for aerobatics!" Only the "Animals" could explain with no-less-than-straight-faces and confidence to be accepted.

It didn't take too long after they arrived at Kadena to have their claim debunked, but that didn't deter them from continuing to display these unique uniforms, even when ultimately re-deploying so-attired to Offutt in their own RC-135. Notice of their sartorial display had preceded them, and the 343<sup>rd</sup> squadron commander, LtCol 'Jumpin' Joe Gyulavics sent a messenger to the arriving aircraft notifying Captain Hedge that the Squadron Commander would like to see him in his office immediately. Captain Hedge, being the calm, unassuming, unshakable leader (that he had to be with the cats he'd been given) knocked on the commander's door and, when told to enter, simply walked in, saluted and before the commander could utter a word, said "I'll take care of it, sir." "Dismissed" was the CO's response and the 'Powder Blue, Okinawan-made, specially and splendidly tailored, Sharkskin flight suits' disappeared into obscurity, as has the history of this group of unique 55<sup>th</sup> members.

- *B/G Reg Urschler*